

Debbie Holmes

TOP TEAM

Model Agency

by Alexander Baron

MJ: How did you first get into modelling?

Deb: I went for an interview with Vogue agency, which was in Brighton, run by Iris Goble. She used to recruit a lot of the Bluebell Girls; that's how it all started. She wanted me to go off to Las Vegas.

Having just left school aged sixteen she decided, probably wisely to give the bright lights of the American gambling capital a miss, and chose a career while she modelled part time. Originally she took her City and Guilds in hair-dressing. In the meantime as well as modelling, she received training and basic choreography from the agency. Debbie's mother had actually run a ballet school, but she gave up all thought of classical dance when she grew too tall. She is not exceedingly tall for a modern woman, but she is the proud owner of a pair of 45 inch legs, which led her to modelling stockings and shoes in abundance; assignments for Christmas cards, postcards and classical fashion houses, (catwalk) also came her way.

MJ: You became an agency boss at a very young age.

Deb: Yes, twenty-one.

MJ: How did that come about?

Deb: Mrs Goble retired and went to live in Spain, and asked me if I'd like to take the agency over.

MJ: And you, full of youthful enthusiasm, said: Yes.

Deb: I did, yes. To be honest there wasn't all that much business to take over; she was the business, like if I were to leave, I am the business. It's whoever actually runs it.

MJ: How many models did you have?

Deb: To start with I didn't have one model on the books. After a year I had six or seven. I didn't have one client.

MJ: Not one client; so what was there to take over?

Deb: I had a shell basically, but I built that up to what it is now.

She called the agency Top Team from the beginning and built it up by sheer hard work, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week. 'It's still much the same now,' she says, except she is secure now.

Despite pressure of work Debbie found time two years ago to get married; her married name is Haywood, and her husband David is an estate-agent. Their businesses are separate entities and she doesn't envisage either of them ever working for the other. She says it is a lot of strain, but so far they are managing very well. Son, Thomas, who is now ten months old, has already made his modelling debut, (see photograph), and she tells me she is five months pregnant now. She is wearing a safari-style loose fitting two piece designer dress which conceals this perfectly. Thomas has a nanny; it's the only practical thing, she says.

The only difficulty she has really experienced on account of her gender is that sometimes men talk down to her, but she says a lot depends on how you answer the phone and project yourself.

The early days consisted mostly of sitting by the telephone waiting for it to ring, pouring money into the business with little or nothing coming back, and working nights and weekends as a hairdresser to pay the bills. She also took out a bank loan, which took five years to pay off.

As she built the agency up she took on a lot of promotion work, but her goal was always to do photographic work. She also had a lot of equity members coming to her looking for TV work, but these were mostly passed on to a theatrical contact.

Coming up to date:

MJ: How much work is there for models in the Brighton area?

Deb: I'm doing very, very well. We're doing a lot of work, and we're getting a lot from London and beyond.



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Debbie Holmes is 28 years old. A former model, she now runs her own agency, Top Team, based in Brighton. I spoke to her at her London office which she opened a mere six weeks ago. Although the London office is new, she started Top Team fully seven years ago when she took over an existing model agency, Vogue, on its owner's retirement.

She is currently working with a Birmingham agency, providing models for them in Brighton. At one time she had visions of opening an office in Scotland but says the travelling ruled it out. It could be though that as most British agencies are based in and around the South East there is a large, untapped market north of the border.

MJ: How many models do you have on your books now?

Deb: I'd say about 80, and that's from babies to one gentleman in his late sixties.

MJ: How many men do you have on your books?

Deb: It's about half and half now. At the beginning it was very difficult to get men. I've got quite a few characters. (character models).

MJ: How do you recruit?

Deb: I advertise, usually about every three months in the local paper. This usually brings in 2 or 3. (She says she rejects 80% of applicants). Clients come mostly from personal recommendation.

MJ: What does she look for in models, in men and women?

Deb: Because I'm very commercial, because I can supply gardeners, bus drivers, that sort of thing for advertisements, I've got a very wide range, (of men) to look at, but I go more on personality, the way they actually project themselves to start with.

She says this latter applies to both sexes. Fashion models must have personality, but equally they need to be the right height. Children she stresses have to be extrovert and above all well behaved.

MJ: You seem to have a lot of shorter girls, five feet two, three.

Deb: You have to be tall for fashion, but for photographic work you can be any height as long as your figure, hair, teeth and everything else is good. For kitchen scenes, advertising a microwave oven there's no way a client would pick a five foot ten girl because she'd make the oven look small.

MJ: What have you done recently?

Deb: We've just done nine shows at Selfridges which

went really well.

MJ: For buyers?

Deb: No, for the public.

They were for Patons, Jaeger and Sarda; they're all wool companies. Recent assignments in Brighton, we've done quite a lot of photographic work for insurance companies, hospital brochures, quite a wide range of work.

MJ: What scale of fees does Top Team charge?

Deb: Obviously being in Brighton we negotiate, but

between 35 to 50 pounds an hour I'd say, up to about 175 for a half day and, at the moment up to 250 for a full day. The agency takes twenty percent commission, and on promotion work we can get between 40 and 80 pounds a day.

Models who want to work for Top Team are given a few basic rules. The most important, she says is always to report in on time, report hours of work on time and

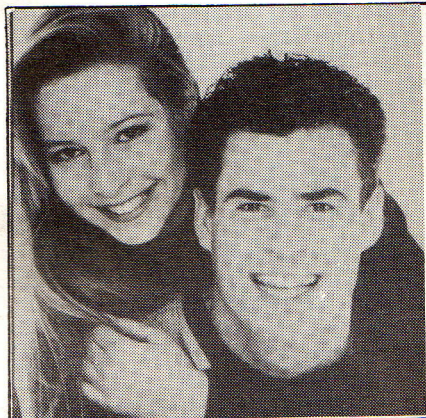
ALWAYS phone in if they are likely to be late. Another thing is always to have the right make up, underwear, extra shoes and the right things for the job.

Top Team models do work for other agencies, something she accepts as long as the work does not conflict which, being based in Brighton hasn't happened yet. Top Team models are expected to provide their own portfolios. ■

TOP TEAM

MODEL AGENCY

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Make-up artists,
Choreographers &
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available



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